INTERVIEWS

‘Repo! The Genetic Opera’ Creators on New 4K Restoration and Wild Set Theft That Nearly Ended ‘The Devil’s Carnival’

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By **Daniel Kurland**

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Horror musicals are a rare subgenre that’s hard to successfully bring to life since these stylized genres can often seem at odds with each other. Nevertheless, there are still subversive films like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Phantom of the Paradise*, and *Sweeney Todd* that do exciting, challenging things with this combination of sensibilities.

Repo! The Genetic Opera is a futuristic dystopian musical in which society has regressed so much that the disenfranchised can have their organs repossessed by the malevolent and monolithic GeneCo. *Repo!* first found life in 2002 as a stage musical by **Darren Smith** and **Terrance Zdunich**, under the title *The Necromerchant’s Debt*. In 2006, a ten-minute short film was directed and financed by **Darren Lynn Bousman** as a proof of concept, before it became its own feature, hot on the heels of Bousman directing his celebrated *Saw* trilogy.

Repo! The Genetic Opera gained a cult following and has continued to play in theaters for years, acquiring a reputation that’s akin to *Rocky Horror*, complete with “shadow cast” performances during shows. It’s a title that continues to come up in conversations nearly two decades later, despite no sequel or official follow-up.

However, the film will be returning to Regal theaters in a new 4K restoration on **May 29**, making this the perfect way to experience this underground sensation.

To celebrate *Repo! The Genetic Opera’s* upcoming 4K release, Darren Lynn Bousman, Terrance Zdunich, and **Bill Moseley** (*Repo!’s* Luigi Largo) open up regarding the horror musical’s enduring legacy two decades later, the hundreds of hours of footage that are being combed through for the new 4K physical media release, and if there’s any hope of a sequel.

BLOODY DISGUSTING: The history of this film has always been one of the most fascinating things to me, with its roots being in a stage musical, then a short film, and then the finished film. What’s it like looking back on the project’s trajectory, but also its legacy, nearly two decades later?

DARREN LYNN BOUSMAN: I tell this story a lot, and it’s one that just makes me happy. When

Repo! came out — No one ever means to make a cult movie. That's not what you set out to do. You mean to make a good movie, and then it may become cult. I think that when we made this movie, we thought it was going to be in 3000 screens, and it was going to be like *Chicago* or some of these other musicals. I remember sitting down with my wife and watching the first major review show that was going to review it — *At the Movies*, with Ben Lyons. So it finally gets to *Repo!* and I remember there was a trailer and he says, "We're going to end the show with what I'm going to say may be the worst movie of all year. No, it's actually maybe in the running for the worst movie of *all time*, *Repo! The Genetic Opera*. And then it went to commercials.

I remember sitting there, and it was like getting punched in the ballsack. Then he comes back and for like four minutes just trashes *Repo!* Just trashes it. At the time, I was like, "Fuck. Oh no," but in retrospect, that review makes me so goddamn happy because here we are, 17 years later, and it still has a fan base and still has people singing the songs in theaters. We're re-releasing it digitally in new 4K and Dolby Atmos. Terrance was saying that all this is our "Middle Finger Tour." It's our "Fuck you Tour," two decades later.

TERRANCE ZDUNICH: I echo everything Darren says. It's wild looking back at it now, both in the sense of, I think the parody of the future we were telling has come true in a very shameless way. So that's wild to see. But I think what's even wilder is the level of creativity that's involved in it. Whether you love it or hate it, it's so bold, and it's so audacious. I think even now there are a lot more movies out there. There are many more things. Technology is better. Somehow *Repo!* still feels like the most creative thing in the room. As one of its primary creators, I'm very proud of that.

I think on some level, whatever that essence is, it's never disappeared. It's been the battery of the whole thing. I think the fan base can feel that, has been changed by it, and has adopted it as their own. There's always been this camp of people who don't get it, and if I think of creativity as being the defining principle, then if they don't get it, it's kind of okay. It's kind of their loss.

DLB: In terms of the project's origins and evolutions, I came on board on Chapter Two of it. It started off in coffee shops and clubs, and then it moved to become a black box theater show. Then Terrance ended up doing it off-off-Broadway. It was insane to see the progression of it, but the one thing that never changed — and the one thing that stayed consistent — is that you knew you were seeing something different. You knew you saw something undefinable.

I remember even in our first production on the stage—we were supposed to be open just a few weekends, but we sold out, and we kept extending and extending and extending because people would talk to their friends and be like, "Dude, it's fucking crazy." We always had this line of people outside waiting to see it. People either loved it or hated it. There was no in-between. I think that's carried over for every incarnation of this thing. It's either a movie you really get or really don't get. I love both ends of that spectrum.

***Repo! The Genetic Opera* is headed back to theaters with a 4K release, but Darren, I saw you sharing that hundreds of hours of behind-the-scenes footage were being looked at. Is a 4K physical media release also on the way?**

DLB: Yeah! Just a few months after the theatrical run, the 4K will come out, and it's got a ton of shit in it. I mean *a ton*. My wife filmed over one hundred hours of behind-the-scenes footage while we were filming. Every second. Every wart. It's there. We have a ton of great stuff. Bill, we haven't asked your permission yet, but I want to put out your initial audition, which I still have on my computer right now, on it. There are so many great things that I think fans would freak out over if and when they see it. So that'll all be there for those who purchase the 4K disc.

On the topic of new footage and physical media releases, fans have always wanted to see *Repo!'s* original short film and the Director's Cut. Will either of those finally be available on the 4K release?

DLB: I can't answer on the short film. Maybe. *Maybe* it's a hidden thing or an Easter Egg that if you find it… On the Director's Cut, though, no, not yet. That is a very expensive thing because when you do a musical, it has to be mixed and color corrected, and there are visual effects to consider. So the Director's Cut exists, but none of that's done with it. So they would have to go back into the actual negatives and fix all that before it'd be released. But there is a ton of extra footage. So maybe if this thing does well, they might put out the Director's Cut a few years later. Bill, how long was it between *The Devil's Rejects* and *3 From Hell*?

BILL MOSELEY: *The Devil's Rejects* was 2005, and then *3 From Hell* was 2019, so 14 years.

DLB: So we would still be longer. We would have 20 years if we ever got to do a sequel.

Is a sequel a possibility? Has there been any renewed interest in your parts on some sort of continuation, especially now that places like Shudder exist? If the 4K theatrical release does well in theaters and the physical media sells, then is there a chance that it could lead to something new? Even if it was a limited series or something other than a movie.

TZ: We've always wanted to do that. This started on the stage. It's an opera. We always loved the idea of an ongoing musical series. It's why we did *The Devil's Carnival*. But as Darren intimated, it's very difficult to do a musical, let alone do it well. Darren and I have discussed more short-form musical pieces. Almost like a bunch of *Thriller*-style short stories, put to music. I think with everything going on, we're hoping that someone shows interest because we certainly would love to do that.

DLB: I mean, listen, I think the thing that's fun here is we left *Repo!* with the Largos in charge. We have Pavi, Luigi, and Amber Sweet. I think that's a fun way to pick back up and see how the world has changed. But Terrance is right, I think that we now live in a world where everyone is distracted with their doom-scrolling and their limited attention spans. So there's an exciting opportunity for short-form verticals, even if we release a series of them. Maybe each vertical has three songs in it, and then you can put them together for a feature later. I think that the opportunities are there for us to do something dynamic if we're given that ability from Lionsgate or whoever. That's what we're hoping for. Would you come back for a sequel, Bill?

BM: I'm down for it. I still take my singing lessons so I can still hit those notes.

Bill, you were also a big part of *The Devil's Carnival*. Is there a character that you preferred between *Repo!*'s Luigi and The Magician from *The Devil's Carnival*? They're both such rich roles.

BM: I certainly loved the Magician because I had a little buddy. Luigi, well, I think Luigi would have been a completely different character if he'd had a little buddy, like Mr. Bunny. Instead, all he had was his violence. I certainly love playing Luigi, but I actually really loved the Magician. I just had so much fun, even though we were freezing our asses off at four in the morning in a tent in Riverside, California. Just jumping around and being the Magician, who is kind of precious, but also very magical. And of course, I had Mr. Bunny.

I was disappointed, though, because we did a sequel, *Alleluia!*, and nobody could find Mr. Bunny. Mr. Bunny had disappeared from the face of the Earth. So I was given a stuffed jackrabbit. It just wasn't the same. Mr. Bunny, of course, was nicely glazed, but the jackrabbit was fully-haired. The only thing missing was the little jackalope horns, and that just wasn't the same.

DLB: Bill, you don't understand that would have all been answered in *The Devil's Carnival* Episode Three. We just never got to that point, sadly.

BM: Exactly, because there was no Mr. Bunny.

TZ: We cursed the whole production with that. We didn't know at the time.

DLB: I have a funny story that I've talked about, but I don't think people actually believe it. I swear to you, this is a true story — it's a *Devil's Carnival* story — but it's one of my favorite stories. We're on the last night or second-to-last night of filming *The Devil's Carnival*, and we were shooting in a not great part of Riverside, California. We're shooting really late at night, and then all of a sudden, my assistant, who doesn't speak great English, comes running and he goes, "Crime. Crime." And he's pointing, and there are these three meth heads running from the

trailer, and they have a bag. Immediately, I knew what that bag was. That bag had the hard drives with all *The Devil's Carnival* footage.

We were such a low-budget film, and we didn't back anything up. If they had gotten away with it, we would have been done. The movie would have never come out. The funniest thing, though, was that everyone was still in make-up. Terrance was still Lucifer. Everyone just takes off running after these guys. There are literally like 30 crew members and cast outside of this house, dressed in full hell regalia. The father comes outside and goes, "Get off our porch! What are you doing in our house?" At the same time, we've called 9-1-1. He's denying that his sons have done any of this.

Long story short, the police showed up, and they were talking to us and said, "Did anyone see any weapons?" We're like, "No." The police said, "Did *anyone see any weapons?*" Someone from our crew goes, "Oh yeah, we saw weapons." They said, "*Thank you*," and that gave them the ability to go into the house, and they got the hard drives back. If they had not retrieved those drives, then there would not be a *Devil's Carnival* or a Magician. We almost lost it to the meth heads.

BM: Wow. It's almost like magic.

DLB: Exactly! It is! We were able to preserve *The Devil's Carnival*!

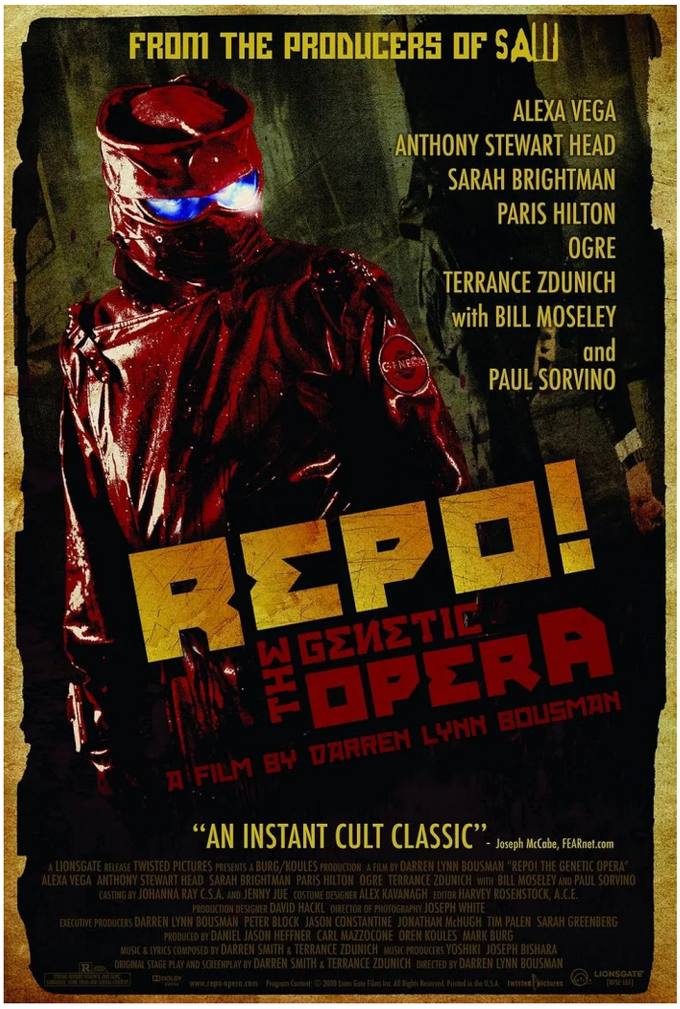
I remember when *Repo! The Genetic Opera* first came out there was a lot of chatter around Paris Hilton's inclusion as Amber Sweet. It's a film that she seems to really be proud of and an experience that she speaks about fondly. Darren, she's even in your next movie, right? Can you all talk a little bit about working with her and her role in everything?

BM: I thought that Paris was great. I really enjoyed working with her. She was very prepared. I do remember going out with her one night. There was a group of us that went out to dinner and then to a discotheque in Toronto. We came in through the kitchen, and there was a dance floor at this discotheque that had an area that was closed off with couches. We were all led into the center of this discotheque dance floor, and all the screens were playing Paris Hilton videos. The music was Paris Hilton disco music, and we basically sat there and ate hors d'oeuvres as Paris vamped around the perimeter of this little island and took selfies with people. Darren, I'm sure you can expound on this a little, but part of what really seemed to gun down *Repo!* was the inclusion of Paris Hilton. I thought that was grossly unfair because she did a great job. She sang. She was a great character.

DLB: What I love most about *Repo!* is just the "What the fuck" factor of it all. I think where *Repo!* succeeds is that it has a complete "What the fuck" factor where you look and see **Sarah Brightman**, world-renowned opera star, and Christine from *Phantom of the Opera*, singing with Paris Hilton, **Ogre** from Skinny Puppy, and **Paul Sorvino**. You have complete opposite ends of the spectrum from Sarah Brightman to Paris Hilton, but it works.

One of the reviews that we got for the stage show, that I feel also translated over to the movie, is that it's a "mishmash opera stew," or something like that. It was basically saying that *Repo!* is every end of the spectrum, and I think that the casting accomplishes that as well. The fact that Paris was willing to come in and basically poke fun at an archetypal character that basically is her — this heiress with this princess mentality. I think it helped cement *Repo!* to be the cult classic that it is now. And yeah, Paris and I are working together right now on another project where, again, she's kind of making fun of that archetypal reality show persona.

***Repo! The Genetic Opera* returns to Regal theaters on May 29 with a 4K restoration.**



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Daniel Kurland

Daniel Kurland is a freelance writer, comedian, and critic, whose work can be read on Splitsider, Bloody Disgusting, Den of Geek, ScreenRant, and across the Internet. Daniel knows that "Psycho II" is better than the original and that the last season of "The X-Files" doesn't deserve the bile that it conjures. If you want a drink thrown in your face, talk to him about "Silent Night, Deadly Night Part II," but he'll always happily talk about the "Puppet Master" franchise. The owls are not what they seem.

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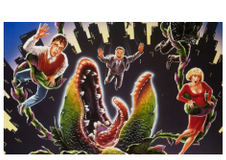

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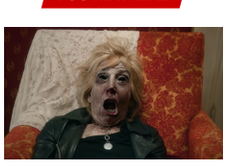

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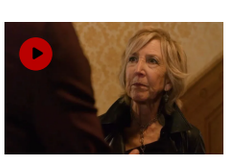

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INTERVIEWS

Natalie Erika James Talks Body Horror, Diet Culture, and 'Saccharine'

Published 1 week ago on May 21, 2026
By **Jenn Adams**

Midori Francis in Natalie Erika James's SACCHARINE. Courtesy of Independent Film Company and Shudder.

One of polite society's few remaining taboos is the concept of weight and self-esteem. Though it's always acceptable to share dieting tips or the latest trendy workout routine, we rarely dig beneath the surface to discuss the dehumanizing pain of fatphobia or the damage caused by toxic body positivity.

For years, social media has blasted us with conflicting messages about how to achieve a "healthy weight," while the medical establishment continues to push outdated information about the body mass index. With Looksmaxxing and 90s thinness now dominating online spaces, it's never felt more frustrating to live comfortably in a human body.

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